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Critical Thinking and Collaboration Skills in Catholic Religious Education: A Study of Junior High School Students

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Abstract
The aims of this research is to find out the critical thinking and collaboration skills of the junior high students in catholic religious subjects. This is a quantitative approach with a descriptive method.The research population were the eighth students of junior high school in Palangkaraya, totaling 35 students. The research instrument used 8 questions for critical thinking skill and 8 questions for collaboration skill. The collected data analyzed using the descriptive analysis. The results of the analysis show that the critical thinking and collaboration of the students are in the middle criteria. Some reasons can be concluded such as teachers' lack of ability to integrate learning that leads to critical and collaborative thinking, monotonous learning activities and the lack of familiarity with religious learning being made into arguments and discussions.

Keywords: *critical thinking; collaboration; catholic religious subjects*

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Introduction
The 21st century has brought unprecedented changes to the educational landscape, demanding new skills and competencies from students (Ramy and Grace, 2024). Digital literacy, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication have become essential pillars of modern education (Falloon, 2020). Educational institutions worldwide are adapting their curricula to incorporate these vital skills into daily learning activities (Cobo, 2013) . Technology integration has transformed traditional teaching methods into more interactive and engaging experiences (John and Penny, 2012) (Peggy et al., 2012). Students now need to master both digital tools and higher-order thinking skills to succeed in their academic journey. Teachers are expected to facilitate learning environments that foster innovation and creativity (Romina and Yves, 2009).

Critical thinking and collaboration stand as fundamental components of modern education that prepare students for future success (Klein, 1993; Laura and María, 2022). These skills enable learners to analyze information critically and work effectively in teams (Armin and Paul, 2013; Kumaran, 2021) . Students who master critical thinking can evaluate sources, identify biases, and make informed decisions (Aston, 2024). Students who have high critical thinking skills can be seen from several indicators (BSKAP, 2022; Leni et al., 2024). First, students are able to ask questions to clarify something. Second, they are able to identify, clarify

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and process information, third, they are able to analyze and evaluate reasoning and procedures, and the last, they are able to reflect and evaluate thinking in groups.

In other hands, Collaborative learning environments help develop leadership skills and emotional intelligence (Roberto et al., 2022). Collaborative learning is a teaching approach that involves students working together in groups to achieve a common goal (Mozhgan, 2012) . This method promotes active participation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among students (Popil, 2011) . In a collaborative learning environment, students are encouraged to share their ideas, perspectives, and knowledge with their peers, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. This type of learning can lead to increased engagement and motivation, as students are able to learn from each other and build on each other's strengths. Collaborative learning also helps students develop important communication and teamwork skills that are essential in the workplace (Gokhale, 1995) (Paris & Robert, 2011) (Trevor et al., 2020) . Overall, collaborative learning can create a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment that enhances the overall learning experience for students. Students wo have high collaboration indicated by their ability to collaborate with others, good communication to achieve the goals, positive interdependence with others and high social coordination.

Critical thinking combined with collaboration creates powerful learning experiences that mirror real-world scenarios (Senthil et al., 2024) . Teachers who emphasize these skills observe improved student engagement and academic performance. Research shows that students who excel in critical thinking and collaboration are better prepared for higher education (Asad, 2022; Kumaran, 2021) . The integration of these skills across subjects creates a more cohesive learning experience. Assessment methods have evolved to evaluate both individual critical thinking and group collaboration abilities.

Religious education has always been identical to the cultivation of dogmatic teachings that make one accept them without protest. Some people consider spiritual lessons are rigid and very monotonous. Critical thinking and collaboration skills are very much needed in carrying out the teachings of a particular faith. In this case, catholic faith. Several challenges emerge when implementing critical thinking and collaboration in Catholic religious education (Pudjiarti, 2024). Some students struggle to balance traditional religious teachings with critical analysis (Parker, 2017). Limited class time makes it difficult to develop both content knowledge and higher-order thinking skills (Hasan et al., 2018).

From the explanation above, there are two problems that examined in this research as the preliminary data, namely : How high the critical thinking and collaboration of junior high school students in catholic religious subject?; How to analyze the results of critical thinking and student collaboration in catholic religious subject?. From the questions, it is expected to find out the facts of stuents critical thinking and collaboration skill in Catholic religious subject.

Methods

Table 1. Indicator used for critical thinking and collaboration questionnaires

Variable	Indicators	Items
Critical thinking skill	Asking questions	2
	Identifying, clarifying, and processing information and ideas	2
	analyze and evaluate reasoning and procedures	2
	Reflecting and evaluating their thoughts in groups	2
Collaboration	Cooperation	2
	Communication to achieve common goals	2
	positive interdependence	2
	Social Coordination	2

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This research adopts a quantitaive research approach with descriptive analysis as prelimiary data (Sugiyono, 2008). The research population were the eighth students of junior high school totaling 35 students. They were given questionnaires of critical thinking skill and collaboration.The questionnaire consisted of questions based of the indicators of critical thinking and collaboration skill. To analyze the validity of the questionnaires used Product Moment Pearson formula, resulting in and the reliability of the questionnaires used Alpha Cronbach's formula. Data questionnaires were analyzed using the descriptive formula. The indicator used for developing critical thinking and collaboration questionnaires can be seen in the table 1.

Results And Discussion

Validity and Reability of questionaries

There were 16 questions with four answer options for each skill set in Likert scale. The questionnaires were developed from indicators of critical thinking skills and collaboration skills. The questionnaires were validated using Product Moment Pearson formula, resulting in 0.500 - 0.780. The reliability of the questionnaires was also calculated before being given to students. The reliability used Alpha Cronbach's formula for the critical thinking skills questionnaire and the result were 0.78 and 0.84 for the collaboration skills.

Data Analysis

The formula for the analysis data used descriptive analysis. The criterias of the data analysis as followed:

Table 2. Criterias of percentage

Criteria	Percentage (%)
High	71-100
Middle	36-71
Low	0-35

Critical Thinking Skill
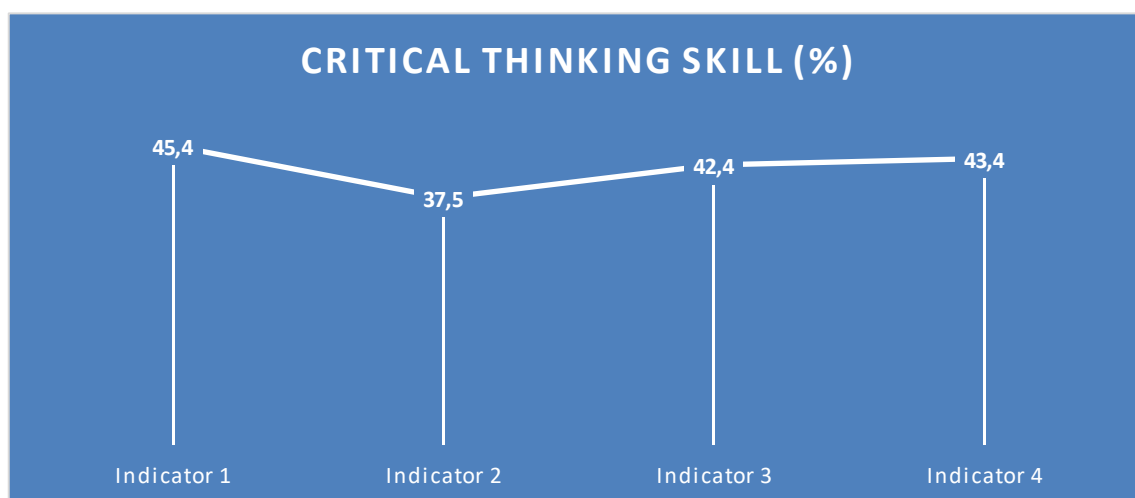
Figure 1. Result of Critical Thinking questionnaires

From the result above, it can be concluded that critical thinking skill of the students in Catholic religious subject is in middle criteria. Eventhough the result is in the middle criteria, the evaluation of this result must be conducted to analyze the fact. The reseacher discussed with the teachers and some students related to the result. From the discussion found that from

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the results of the discussion it was found that critical thinking skills were less facilitated in learning. Teachers are accustomed to using textbooks to teach and do not use other learning resources. teachers also apply lecture methods that make learning monotonous and students tend to be passive in learning. Teachers argue that religious learning is learning that cannot be made in various ways because the content of the learning is about dogmatic and theological matters related to the Bible.

Collaborative Skill
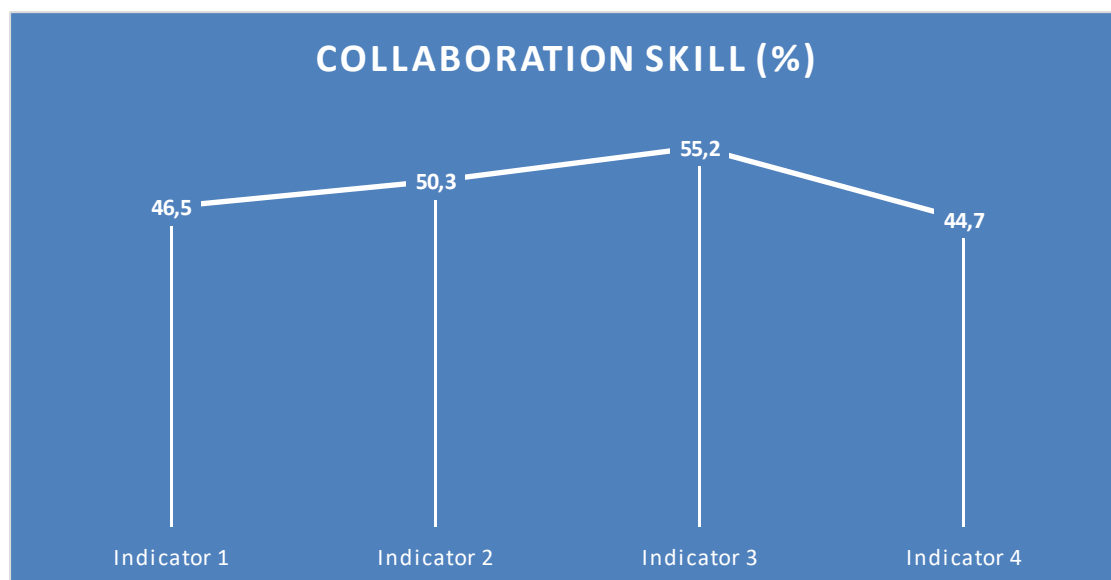
Figure 2. Result of Collaborative Skill questionnaires

The result of collaboration skill is the results of the collaborative questionnaire fall into the middle criteria. the results were communicated to teachers and students and it was found that in Catholic religious learning, students are accustomed to working individually even though sometimes they also work in groups for small discussions.

Discussion

Critical thinking has become an essential skill in today's rapidly evolving educational landscape (Williams, 2023). As technology continues to advance and information becomes more readily accessible, the ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information is crucial for success in both academic and professional settings (Kimberly et al., 2007) . In order to navigate this complex and ever-changing world, students must be equipped with the tools to think critically and make informed decisions (Esmat & Rawan, 2024).Students who develop strong critical thinking abilities can effectively analyze information, solve complex problems, and make well-reasoned decisions (Lok et al., 2023) . In the classroom, this manifests through activities like examining multiple perspectives, questioning assumptions, and developing evidence-based arguments—all of which prepare students for both academic success and real-world challenges (Minchi & Michael, 2011).

Collaboration, equally vital, enables students to leverage diverse viewpoints and skills to achieve common goals (Panitz, 1999) . When students work together, they learn to communicate effectively, negotiate differences, and build upon each other's strengths (Julia et al., 2009) . This cooperative approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also develops crucial social skills that employers increasingly value in the modern workplace.The intersection of critical thinking and collaboration creates a powerful learning environment where students can challenge each other's ideas constructively, leading to deeper understanding. Through group discussions, project-based learning, and peer review activities,

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students learn to evaluate arguments, provide constructive feedback, and refine their thinking based on others' input. These combined skills are particularly relevant in preparing students for future careers where complex problem solving often requires both independent analysis and effective teamwork.

From the results of the study it was found that students' critical thinking and collaboration skills tend to be in a fairly low position. This fact is a common concern that students' critical and collaborative thinking skills must be improved. Teachers as the key to controlling learning activities need to seek the latest information that correlates with the demands of 21st century learning.

Conclusion

The research found that students' critical thinking and collaboration skills tend to be in a fairly low position. The critical thinking skill are 45.4% students were able to ask questions if there was something they did not understand, 37.5% students were able to identify, clarify, and process information and ideas, 42.4% students were able to analyze and evaluate their reasoning and procedures, and 43.4% students were able to reflect and evaluate their thinking in groups. The colaboration skill are 46.5% students were able to work together, 50.3% students understood that in a group they had to be able to communicate to achieve a common goal, 55.2% students realized that there was positive interdependence in the group, and 44.7% students were able to align actions in the group to achieve a common goal.

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